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Refitting and Altering Ready-to-Wear



South Dakota State University
Cooperative Extension Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

Refitting and Altering Ready-to-Wear

By Elizabeth K. Easton, Extension clothing specialist

Individual variations in posture and body build create a need for minor alterations in ready-to-wear clothing, even though basically the garment fits. Also, the design of the garment, the manufacturer and the price range may cause some variations in fit in any given size.

Altering a finished garment is costly, considering your own time or the extra charges paid at the store or to a professional seamstress.

It is always important to buy a dress in the size that requires a minimum of adjustment. Therefore, it is unwise to acquire the habit of buying one particular size, assuming it will be the best fit.

Tricks for Finding Dresses That Fit

1. If you're shortwaisted, try a half size or a petite.
2. If your figure is slender and youthful, a junior size may be best.
3. Look for tall sizes if you're above average height.
4. Remember it's always easier to *take in* than it is to *let out*.
5. If there is any doubt about whether the dress can be made to fit properly, don't buy it.

Ask Yourself These Questions

1. Is the style of the garment suitable for altering?
2. Is the garment cut on straight grain?
3. Are the seam allowances wide enough to give stability if let out?
4. Is the neckline fashioned for suitable alteration?

Solutions To Common Questions

1. Shoulder seams too long?
 - Take up extra length with front and back shoulder darts.
 - OR
 - Stitch in a back shoulder dart and take up extra fabric in front by easing.
 - OR
 - Make small darts at the back of the neckline.
 - OR
 - Trim armhole *very slightly over the top only!* (Be Careful)
2. Shoulder line too short?
 - Narrow the seam allowance over the shoulder cap.
 - OR
 - Release darts if any, in shoulder seam or back neckline.
3. Waistline too tight or too loose?
 - Release or deepen darts.
 - OR
 - Increase or decrease seam allowance at waistline.
4. Wrinkles caused by strain in armhole area?
 - Rip upper part of sleeve and release shoulder seam. Refit sleeve into armhole.
5. Excess fabric in armhole area?
 - Rip upper part of sleeve and increase shoulder seam. Refit sleeve into armhole. This may call for trimming some fabric from the *top* of the sleeve only. Be Careful!
6. Wrinkles and/or strain in the bodice?
 - Consider altering the darts, by shortening, lengthening, lowering or raising the position of the dart.
 - OR
 - Release under arm seams of bodice.
7. Diagonal wrinkles in sleeve cap?
 - Remove sleeve and re-position in armhole so GRAIN lines are straight, usually moving the sleeve forward so there are no wrinkles.
8. Wrinkles across upper back?
 - Remove collar and/or facing and stitch in small neckline darts at back of neck. Re-attach collar and facing.
9. Skirt cups in back?
 - Lift the skirt at center back only. In a one piece pattern, this way requires raising the whole center back of garment and re-inserting the back closure. (A big job!)

A Word To The Wise

Some extensive alterations are just not worth the time, money, and effort. Neckline, shoulder, and arm-scye changes are often difficult and time-consuming. They may not be worth the effort.

Too many or too extreme alterations in one garment may affect the design lines of the garment, even distorting the proportions.

Becomingness and comfort are rarely achieved by alteration when you must make the garment into another size. However, it is possible to completely rip a garment and recut it into a smaller size.

For more information see EC 678, Pattern Alteration and Selection.

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